

Chorus, soloists complement Solti's Mozart masterpiece

By John von Rhein

Music critic

Georg Solti has long boasted of his happy marriage with the Chicago Symphony, so there were no raised eyebrows this week when the orchestra management announced it had extended Solti's contract another four years, through the 1988-89 season. By then he will have been CSO music director for two decades, giving him the longest tenure of any conductor of an American orchestra.

For the coming three seasons Solti will be more prominent than ever, occupying the podium for 10 weeks of subscription concerts each year. During the current season he will be in residence for a somewhat shorter time, and in fact his Mozart program Thursday night marked the end of his autumn term at Orchestra Hall.

So one could regard this concert either as the culmination of a 16-year Mozart odyssey, or as a foretaste of the Mozartean experiences Solti has yet to bring us. Either way, his account of the "Great" C-Minor Mass, K.427, was splendid, a fusion of the dramatic urgency that is a Solti trademark, with the warmer, more personal emotion that has entered the maestro's Mozart in recent years.

Originally Solti had scheduled the Requiem Mass for these concerts, but he is reportedly unconvinced by existing editions and thus substituted Mozart's other unfinished choral masterpiece. He had directed a good performance of the work here seven years ago, but the present one far surpassed it, not only because the solo

and choral singing were markedly superior, but also because here he was shaping word-meanings within long musical phrases, not just punching out rhythms.

Employing a mixed chorus of about 75 voices, and fairly large orchestral forces, Solti's account was not the kind of lean, relatively intimate Mozart that fashion favors. He obviously wished to stress the weighty majesty of this greatest of Mozart's choral works, and with such a superbly disciplined and responsive chorus as Margaret Hillis' to help him secure that objective, who could possibly fault the results? Solti, to his credit, used the Robbins Landon edition, which trims the sections added after Mozart's death to turn this incomplete torso into a full setting of the liturgy.

The exceptionally well-matched quartet of soloists was Marvis Martin, Anne Sofie von Otter, Jerry Hadley and Malcolm King. The men had relatively little to sing, but sang their parts expressively and well. Mozart said he liked an aria to fit a singer as perfectly as a well-tailored suit of clothes—an ideal description of the rich, radiant tone and supple phrasing Martin lavished on the florid "Et incarnatus est." Excellent, too, was Von Otter, who revealed a clear, agile, flexible and unhoity mezzo-soprano.

The program opened with the Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K.466. Despite the fine teamwork exhibited by Solti, the orchestra and Tamas Vasary, the elegant, cultivated soloist, one felt the tragic depths at times were insufficiently plumbed.